

Photographing Wild Water: Capturing The Essence and Beauty of Flowing Water

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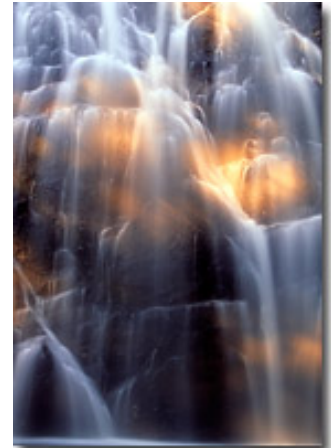
Streams, waterfalls, cascades, and rivers are some of the most captivating and often-photographed subjects in nature. Creating powerful and interesting compositions of water is one of the most challenging, yet rewarding of photographic pursuits. Flowing water is not only one of the most beautiful elements of nature but also the most common and accessible subjects for most photographers. The following suggestions will help you to express your creative mind's eye when shooting all forms of water.

Strive For The Right Light

Waterfalls, streams, rivers, and cascades offer foam, bubbles, and shapes that will highlight the water's dramatic appeal. The soft light of overcast days, shade, or twilight is needed in order to accurately record water and its surrounding elements.

Essential Tools For The Job

Aside from a sturdy tripod for precise framing and camera stability, a polarizing filter is one piece of equipment you will often use when capturing moving water. Keeping in mind your subject matter and all that surrounds it, a polarizing filter will remove glare from wet rocks, the water, and foliage in the frame, producing a richly saturated image. This filter will also allow for longer shutter speeds which often necessary for a soft, foamy effect. Film users will need a warming filter for shooting in shade and at twilight in order to remove unwanted, blue color cast. Digital users, on the other hand, can combat this easily with white balance. An essential piece of equipment when capturing moving water is a cable release. A cable release allows you to lock up your shutter and trip the camera without introducing vibrations.



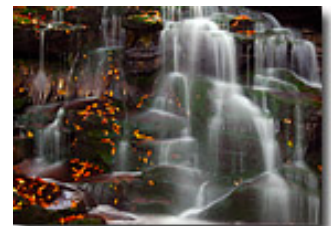
Use The K.I.S.S Approach

Keep it Simple Silly! Simple and direct compositions with two or three key picture elements usually create the most powerful and captivating images. Whether you are using a wide-angle or telephoto lens to frame the scene, strive to keep the composition clean. The viewers should have no question as to what the main subject is in a photograph. To make certain you have accomplished this, it is best to always remember the rule of thirds. This is particularly helpful when composing shots of streams, waterfalls and cascades, as they are often surrounded by a defined horizon or foreground. Simplicity is key. If shooting with a digital camera, be sure to check the image composition and make any changes on the spot until you feel it is right.



Incorporate Rocks, Trees, and Plants

By using the rocks, trees, plants and foliage surrounding your water subject, you will be adding dimension and depth to your photo. Pay careful attention on focusing your subjects, specifically the surrounding foliage that might move with even the slightest of breezes. This is where your unwavering patience will be necessary. You always want to capture the sharpest image possible.



“S” Curves And Diagonal Lines

When photographing streams and rivers, look for winding “S” curves and diagonal lines that will help the viewer through the image. For example, when the river comes to a sharp bend, you may want to plant your tripod just below the curve and have the river run up into the frame from one corner. Try several locations and perspectives before committing to a location so that you know what will create the most interesting composition. Again, patience is the key for setting up the shot several times before taking any actual photographs. If there is a specific focal point in the scene,

be certain that the "S" curve or diagonal line you use leads the viewer's eye directly to that target. Whether a moss-covered rock, twisted tree, or flowering plant is your focal point for the viewer, find a line of water to lead them there!

Get Your Feet Wet

Many times the best angle for streams and waterfall scenes is right in the middle of the water. Bring a sturdy pair of hiking boots (waterproof of course!) as well as a trekking pole to balance yourself when navigating across wet, slippery rocks and boulders. Chest waders are essential for cold weather when you need to go into the water for a better angle.

Watch The Sky

When shooting on overcast days, be sure to keep the white portion of the sky out of the frame. This will weaken the composition and distract the viewer from your subject matter. During the golden hours of the day and twilight, you will want to utilize a graduated neutral density filter to preserve detail in the shadows. Be certain to position the ND filter precisely as to not darken the foliage and subject matter in the shade. Use your camera's depth-of-field preview when positioning the filter to help see where the transition accurately lines up.

Protect Yourself And Your Equipment

Whenever entering streams, creeks, and plunge pools below waterfalls, be sure to check the depth and temperature of the water before you go in. Use your tripod or trekking poles to steady yourself while slowly and deliberately entering the water. Bring along a pair of chest waders when shooting in cold weather conditions. Spray from waterfalls and foaming water will often soak the photographer as well as their equipment, so it is a good idea to bring along a small towel or large zip lock bags to help keep your equipment safe and dry. During actual shooting, make it a habit to check the front lens element for spray and water droplets. Carry along a lens cloth that is easily assessable for wiping down your lens. Assume all rocks and logs are slippery and dangerous. Using trekking poles or your tripod for support is always a good idea for protecting yourself when entering the water.

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Joseph Rossbach is a professional landscape and nature photographer based out of Annapolis, Maryland. Over the past ten years, he has traveled into some of the most beautiful and remote areas of the United states in order to capture the American landscape. His images have appeared in local and regional magazines, calenders, advertising campaigns, websites and in books and art galleries and corporate collections. To see more of Joeseeph's images visit his website at www.josephrossbach.com.

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